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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 000510

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO/T (BLACKWOOD), GENEVA FOR HOHMAN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [WHO](#) [TW](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN ANNOUNCES BREAKTHROUGH AGREEMENT ON WHA

REF: TAIPEI 467

Classified By: Director Stephen M. Young for reasons 1.4(b/d)

Summary

1. (C) Based on an April 28 personal invitation from WHO Director General Margaret Chan, Taiwan Health Minister Yeh Ching-chuan will lead a delegation to observe the May World Health Assembly meeting, VFM Andrew Hsia told the Director during an April 29 meeting. The invitation is the result of Taipei's engagement with the WHO, improvements in cross-Straits relations, and the efforts of Taiwan's international partners. Hsia thanked the United States for its longstanding support, urged an appropriate U.S. endorsement of the outcome, and requested a bilateral meeting with the U.S. delegation on the margins of the WHA session. End Summary.

WHO Head Invites Taiwan to Observe WHA

2. (C) On April 28, Taiwan Health Department Minister Yeh Ching-chuan received a fax from WHO Secretary General Margaret Chan, inviting Taiwan to attend the May 18-27 WHA meeting as an observer, VFM Andrew Hsia told the Director during a meeting on the morning of April 29. Importantly, Hsia said, the invitation refers to Yeh as "Minister" of the Department of Health of Chinese Taipei. Taiwan will accept the "very pleasing" invitation, with Yeh leading a delegation composed primarily of health experts. Hopefully, Hsia said, the U.S. and Taiwan delegations can meet on the margins of the WHA session.

3. (C) The invitation is for this year's WHA meeting only, Hsia said, stressing that there is no such thing as a permanent WHA observer. He claimed that Taiwan is being treated just like the other six WHA observers, who receive an invitation each year. Taiwan would have exactly the same rights and obligations of these other observers and would be on an equal footing with them. In a meeting after the announcement, Legislative Yuan Speaker Wang Jin-pyng warned the Director that, while the fact that the invitation came from the WHO itself was a positive development, the DPP would certainly claim the use of "Chinese Taipei" compromises Taiwan's sovereignty and dignity. Wang added that the DPP could also argue that the invitation fails to address the larger issue of Taiwan's involvement in the organization itself. Hsia, Health Minister Yeh and MAC Chairperson Lai Hsin-yuan, held a joint press conference at midday to announce this decision. President Ma's office released a

statement, noting that the President chaired a high-level meeting to discuss the development and echoing the point Hsia made privately with the Director. Ma is expected to address the issue publicly as well, possibly on April 30.

Taiwan Hopes for U.S. Statement, Letter, HHS Bilateral

14. (C) During the morning meeting, the Director congratulated Hsia and noted that rising concerns about swine flu will make this year's WHA session particularly important. Washington was likely to issue a statement on April 29, supporting the development, he said. Hsia again thanked the United States for its efforts and said Taipei would welcome such a statement. MOFA Director General for North American Affairs Harry Tseng noted that, in previous years, the U.S. HHS Secretary had sent WHO DG Chan a letter in support of Taiwan's meaningful participation. A similar letter, welcoming this outcome, might now be appropriate, he suggested.

Invitation Not Just a PRC Decision

15. (C) The PRC reportedly has been active in Washington and other capitals, Hsia said, portraying the invitation as having come at Beijing's request. This is not entirely accurate, he insisted. For years, Taiwan has made clear that it believes the ability to take part in WHO activities to be a fundamental human right of the 23 million people on the island. More concretely, in March, Taiwan CDC head Steven

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Kuo sent a letter to his point of contact at the WHO expressing Taiwan's strong desire to observe at the May WHA session. It was this, coupled with the improvement in cross-Straits ties and the support of the United States and others, that led to a breakthrough, according to Hsia.

16. (C) The Director asked about access, noting that, in the past, Taiwan media and others had encountered problems gaining access to public activities of UN-affiliated organizations. Based on contacts between Taiwan and PRC health officials, Hsia said, it appeared that this will not be an issue in May. Recent instances in which Taiwan (i.e., Republic of China) passport holders were refused access to UN activities open to the public appeared to be unprompted acts by UN security personnel anxious to avoid offending Beijing rather than the result of PRC pressure.

Public Reactions Split Along Party Lines

17. (C) Reactions to the announcement reflected partisan political divisions on Taiwan. In a meeting with the Director after the announcement, Taoyuan county magistrate and Ma Ying-jeou confidante Eric Chu said Taiwan and China had agreed on the arrangement several weeks ago. Although Ma is aware that die-hard opposition politicians will criticize the fact that the WHO letter refers to Chinese Taipei rather than Taiwan or the Republic of China, Chu said, Ma is confident that most people will be pleased with the arrangement. People accept the name "Chinese Taipei," he said, and the swine flu scare has driven home the importance of integrating Taiwan into the global health system. In comments to the press, pro-KMT academics attributed the invitation to the improved cross-Straits environment since Ma took office and Beijing's need to win the "hearts and minds" of the 23 million Taiwan people. These same academics warned that it is too early to say if Beijing will accept the same model for other international organizations.

18. (SBU) On the other hand, opposition DPP legislators William Lai and Huang Wei-cher downplayed the impact of Taiwan's participation in this year's WHA meeting in the press, focusing instead on the (supposed) concessions the Ma

administration must have made to secure the invitation. They also questioned whether Taiwan's delegation will be considered part of a larger China delegation, thereby minimizing or eliminating any significant participation by Taiwan.

Looking at Other UN Technical Organizations - Later

¶9. (C) Asked by the Director whether Taiwan's WHA participation might serve as a model for involvement in other UN agencies, Hsia said the idea is "worth studying." For now, Taiwan is focused on Geneva in May, but there are other technical organizations that would benefit from Taiwan's presence. Hsia noted in particular the IMO and ICAO, but said MOFA is still studying what its next steps might be.

WHA Should Not Slow Progress on U.S. Beef

¶10. (C) Noting the number of issues on the Health Minister's plate, including swine flu and now the need to travel to Geneva for at least a week, the Director emphasized the importance of not losing sight of the need to make progress soon on opening Taiwan's market fully to U.S. beef. The Health Department is Taiwan's key bureaucratic player on the issue. Hsia assured the Director that Yeh remains well aware of U.S. concerns.

Comment

¶11. (C) Today's announcement is undoubtedly particularly welcome in light of the blanket coverage swine flu is receiving in the Taiwan media. The only real "surprise" in today's announcement was WHO DG's use of the Yeh Ching-chuan's title of "Minister," and the official overtones it carries. While we expect that many in the opposition would criticize almost any deal the Ma administration reached, and will do so on this occasion, we believe that

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this breakthrough will be well-received (and rightly so) by a broad majority of ordinary people here.
YOUNG